

# California State Auditor

B U R E A U O F S T A T E F I N A N C E

## California's Wildlife Habitat and Ecosystem:

*The State Needs to Improve Its Land  
Acquisition Planning and Oversight*



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# **California's Wildlife Habitat and Ecosystem:**

*The State Needs to Improve Its Land  
Acquisition Planning and Oversight*

**C A L I F O R N I A   S T A T E   A U D I T O R**

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# CONTENTS

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<i>Summary</i>	1
<hr/>	
<i>Introduction</i>	5
<hr/>	
<i>Chapter 1</i>	
<hr/>	
California Does Not Have a Policy Governing Statewide Land Use Planning	13
Recommendations	21
<hr/>	
<i>Chapter 2</i>	
<hr/>	
The Department of Fish and Game and the Department of Parks and Recreation Should Improve Management of Their Land	23
Recommendations	31
<hr/>	
<i>Appendix</i>	
<hr/>	
Land Acquired by the Department of Fish and Game, the Department of Parks and Recreation, and State Conservancies for Ecosystem Restoration and Wildlife Habitat Preservation	33
<hr/>	
<i>Responses to the Audit</i>	
<hr/>	
Office of Planning and Research	37
California Resources Agency	39
<hr/>	
<i>California State Auditor's Comments on the Response From the California Resources Agency</i>	43
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# SUMMARY

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## Audit Highlights . . .

*Although various entities acquire land for ecosystem restoration and wildlife habitat preservation, the State does not have a comprehensive land use policy that provides a common vision of goals and objectives that these entities can follow.*

*The two state departments that are acquiring the most land for these purposes—the Department of Fish and Game and the Department of Parks and Recreation—have not performed key tasks for managing these properties. Specifically, they:*

- ☒ *Have not prepared management plans for at least one-third of their properties.*
  - ☒ *Use outdated management plans for many properties.*
  - ☒ *Inadequately manage some land because they have not achieved certain management objectives or undertaken specific projects.*
  - ☒ *Insufficiently document their management efforts.*
- 

## RESULTS IN BRIEF

**T**he State of California is home to numerous animal and plant species that are listed as endangered or threatened. Many entities, including state and federal agencies and private and nonprofit organizations, acquire land in California to preserve and restore the environments in which these plants and animals live. Although the CALFED Bay-Delta Program (Calfed) does not acquire land for these purposes, it funds projects that may include land acquisition that support its goals for restoring the ecosystem. State entities that do acquire land for environmental purposes include the Department of Fish and Game (Fish and Game), which acquires land to protect rare, endangered, or threatened animals, and the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR), which acquires land to preserve the natural resources of its park system. Each of the many entities that acquire land has a process for selecting and acquiring land to accomplish its individual mission and objectives, but a uniform statewide process for acquiring such land does not exist.

More importantly, the State does not have an overall policy with goals and objectives for statewide land use that would ensure that the efforts of various entities are coordinated. Although each player identifies the land necessary to fulfill its individual ecosystem restoration objectives, and some degree of formal and informal coordination occurs among state, federal, local, and private entities when acquiring specific properties, no central vision exists of how these efforts benefit the State as a whole.

The Legislature recognized the need to protect state land resources and to ensure that this land was preserved and used in economically and socially desirable ways. As early as 1970, it charged the Office of Planning and Research (OPR), housed within the Governor's Office, with overseeing the continuous evaluation and execution of statewide environmental goals. Thirty years later, the OPR still has not developed a statewide land use policy. Although it acknowledges its responsibility, the OPR has insufficient resources to fulfill its various statutory obligations, including this task. A statewide policy would incorporate the needs and priorities of the State and could furnish a framework for the many entities that acquire land for ecological

To ensure that they adequately manage their land, Fish and Game and the DPR should do the following:

- Prepare management plans for all properties, update older plans, and then follow them.
- Continue to request additional funding so that land acquired for ecosystem restoration and wildlife habitat preservation is kept in its desired condition.

As the public has recently expressed an interest in preserving land for environmental purposes, the Legislature should consider doing the following:

- Establish a mechanism in future bond acts involving land acquisitions that sets aside a portion of the proceeds for major maintenance projects.
- Establish a mechanism to ensure that ongoing management of land acquired with the bond money is funded; for example, it could create a designated revenue stream or require the departments to establish a plan demonstrating how those ongoing costs will be met before they acquire the land.

### **AGENCY COMMENTS**

The Office of Planning and Research concurs with our recommendations. It also recognizes the importance of other state entities having adequate information and the necessary data that will allow it to effectively coordinate land use planning and to develop a statewide environmental goals and policies report.

The California Resources Agency did not address all of our recommendations, stating only that it will work with the Department of Fish and Game and the Department of Parks and Recreation to develop new plans or review and update, as necessary, existing plans for all properties. Therefore, we look forward to receiving its 60-day, six-month, and one-year responses to the audit to assess the steps taken towards implementing our recommendations. ■

# INTRODUCTION

## BACKGROUND

**E**cosystem restoration and the preservation of wildlife habitat entails rehabilitating, restoring, protecting, and conserving environments where plant and animal species live. Growing public recognition of the social, economic, and ecological costs of environmental degradation has stimulated interest in preserving and restoring ecosystems within California. The need to restore ecosystems and preserve wildlife habitats is critical not only because of the numerous plant and animal species in California that are listed as endangered or threatened, but also because doing so provides benefits to human communities. For example, some organisms help improve water quality and pollinate crops.

Acquiring land is one way to restore and preserve the ecosystem and habitat of such animal species as the California condor, Delta smelt, and Mojave ground squirrel and such plant species as the Siskiyou mariposa lily and Monterey spineflower. In California, numerous entities, including local, state, and federal agencies as well as private organizations, acquire land for ecosystem restoration and wildlife habitat preservation. Each of these entities has a process for selecting and acquiring property to accomplish its individual mission and objectives. However, a uniform statewide process for land acquisition for such purposes does not exist.

### Member Agencies of Calfed

#### Federal

U.S. Department of the Interior

- Bureau of Reclamation
- Fish and Wildlife Service
- Bureau of Land Management
- U.S. Geological Survey

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

U.S. Department of Commerce

- National Marine Fisheries Service

U.S. Department of Agriculture

- Natural Resources Conservation Service
- U.S. Forest Service

Western Area Power Administration

#### State

California Resources Agency

- Department of Water Resources
- Department of Fish and Game

California Environmental Protection Agency

- State Water Resources Control Board

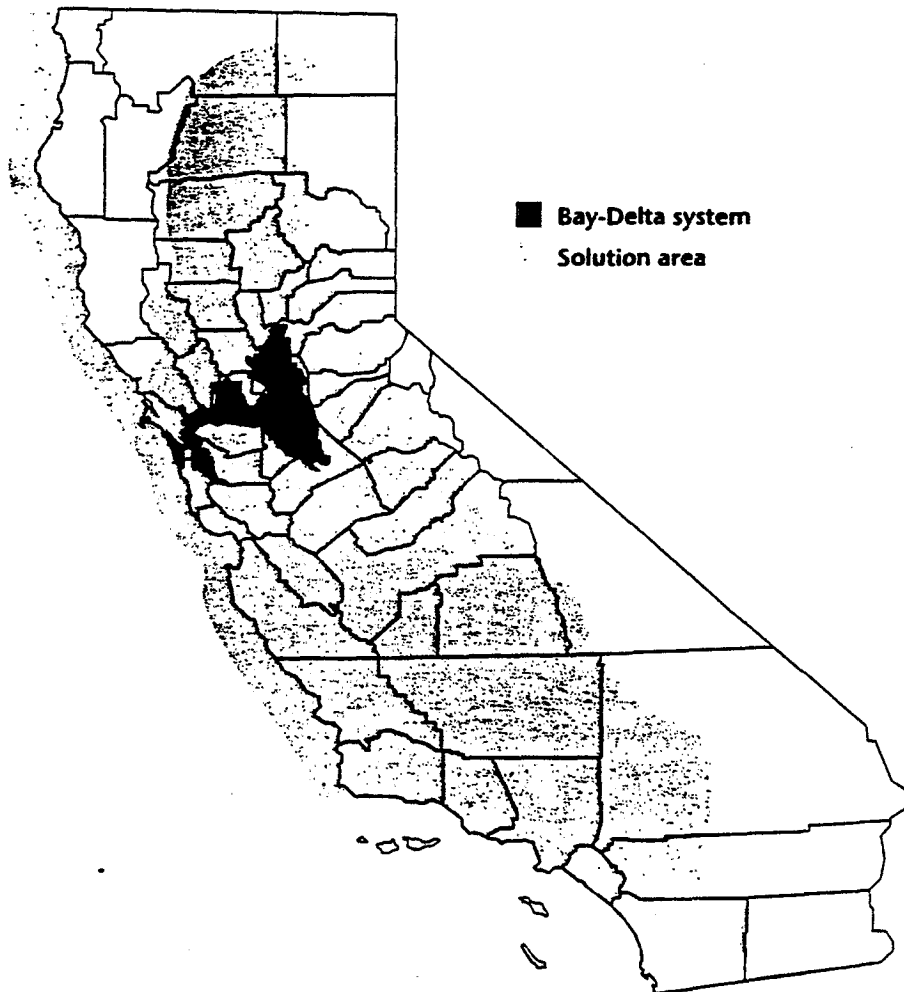
California Department of Food and Agriculture

State entities that play a role in restoring California's ecosystem and preserving its wildlife include the CALFED Bay-Delta Program (Calfed), the Department of Fish and Game (Fish and Game), the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR), and state conservancies.

group, consisting of member agencies, makes final funding recommendations to the California Secretary of Resources and the U.S. Secretary of the Interior.

**FIGURE 1**

**Solution Areas Extend CALFED Influence Far Beyond System Boundaries**



Source: CALFED Bay-Delta Program

Between 1995 and 1999, Calfed received more than 800 proposals from private and public parties with interests in ecosystem restoration, including state and federal agencies, universities, nonprofit organizations, private entities, local governments, and joint ventures. As of May 2000, it has funded a total of 268 projects amounting to \$229.4 million. Figure 2 show the various categories of the projects it has funded.

land by other means, such as gifts, donations, exchanges, easements, and transfers. In fiscal year 2000-01, the May revision to the Governor's Budget may allow the board to receive up to \$54 million as part of a land conservation program that gives grants for the purchase and restoration of wildlife habitat. The May revision also includes additional funds for the board to acquire land adjacent to the planned new University of California Merced campus to ensure the protection of wetlands, waterways, and wildlife around the campus.

Fish and Game's mission is to manage California's fish, wildlife, and plant resources, including habitats, for their ecological values and recreational enjoyment. The department manages land to preserve or restore habitat for threatened or endangered species; game species, including deer, waterfowl, and sport fish; and migratory birds and wetland or upland wildlife. Fish and Game also assumes responsibility for properties that it receives through settlements and other agreements, such as mitigation for habitat impacts.

#### **THE ROLE OF THE DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION**

Another state entity with a major role in acquiring land for ecosystem restoration and wildlife habitat preservation is the DPR. The DPR is not a member of CalFed. Its mission is to provide for the health, inspiration, and education of the people of California by helping to preserve the State's diverse plant and animal species, protecting its most valuable natural and cultural resources, such as redwood forests and historical artifacts, and creating opportunities for high-quality outdoor recreation. To accomplish its mission, the DPR must sometimes acquire land. For instance, it recently acquired Sentenac Canyon for inclusion in the Anza-Borega Desert State Park. The majority of this new acquisition will be used to restore or enhance riparian habitat.

Funding for the DPR's land acquisitions comes largely from bond acts such as Proposition 12, the Safe Neighborhood Parks, Clean Water, Clean Air, and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2000, which in fiscal year 1999-2000 will furnish up to \$525 million for various purposes, including acquiring land.



The role of these conservancies is to protect and preserve six legislatively created zones in various parts of the State. State conservancies can acquire land to restore and preserve habitat and ecosystems. For example, the California Tahoe Conservancy can acquire land to protect the natural environment of the Lake Tahoe Basin or to protect land in its zone that is susceptible to erosion.

The conservancies receive funding for land acquisitions from various sources, including bond acts, grants, and the State's General Fund. Funding and staffing amounts vary widely depending on the size of the conservancy. For example, the State Coastal Conservancy has a staff of 50 and an annual budget of almost \$40 million, while the San Joaquin River Conservancy has 1.5 staff positions and an annual budget of \$200,000.

## **SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY**

The Joint Legislative Audit Committee directed the Bureau of State Audits to review the state entities that acquire land for ecosystem restoration and wildlife habitat preservation, both within and independent of Calfed. Because Calfed does not directly acquire land, our review of this program was limited to its project selection process and its coordination efforts with federal, state, and local agencies as well as the public.

To determine whether the State has developed a comprehensive land use policy, we reviewed relevant laws and regulations and interviewed the management of various state agencies, including the governor's Office of Planning and Research and the Resources Agency.

To obtain an understanding of its role in acquiring such land and coordinating with other state, federal, and local entities, we interviewed Calfed staff, reviewed its project selection process, and examined relevant documentation.

To identify those state entities that acquire such land, we interviewed the management of departments under the Resources Agency and the California Environmental Protection Agency and reviewed departmental mission statements. We also reviewed the goals and objectives of Fish and Game and the DPR, the major purchasers of land for these purposes, as well as the goals and objectives of the six state conservancies.

# CHAPTER 1

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## **California Does Not Have a Policy Governing Statewide Land Use Planning**

### CHAPTER SUMMARY

**T**he State does not have an overall plan for coordinating the acquisition of land for wildlife habitat preservation and ecosystem restoration. In the absence of a statewide approach, various entities are coordinating land acquisitions at regional levels. For example, the CALFED Bay-Delta Program (Calfed) encourages coordination among its participating federal and state agencies. The formal and informal approaches used by state entities on a regional level demonstrate the need to coordinate efforts statewide.

As early as 1970, the Legislature directed the Governor's Office to oversee statewide land use planning, including the ongoing evaluation and execution of environmental goals. In enacting the law, the Legislature recognized the need for the State to protect its resources and to ensure the preservation and use of its land in economically and socially desirable ways. However, the governor's Office of Planning and Research (OPR) has not developed a comprehensive statewide land use policy in the past three decades as state law requires, because this task has not been its top priority. The State is not capturing sufficient data to identify the purpose for which land is acquired, a key component in land use planning.

### **DESPITE VARIOUS COORDINATION EFFORTS, THE STATE STILL NEEDS A COHESIVE LAND USE POLICY**

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*State, federal, and nongovernmental entities acquire land for preserving the environment.*

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State entities have their own individual missions, goals, and strategies for restoring ecosystems or preserving wildlife habitat, which may include acquiring land. For example, the Department of Fish and Game (Fish and Game) can acquire land to protect rare, endangered, or threatened animal species, while the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) can acquire land to preserve and protect the value and beauty of natural resources in state parks. Federal agencies and nongovernmental organizations also acquire land for ecological purposes.

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*Although the Natural Community Conservation Planning program, conservancies, and joint ventures present many opportunities for coordination, a statewide land use policy is still needed.*

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Riverside, Los Angeles, and San Bernardino counties. In the future, however, the program may expand its planning efforts to address environmental concerns in other regions of the State.

Fish and Game provides guidance and assistance to local agencies choosing to develop and implement a plan under the NCCP. The core group that oversees NCCP activities includes representatives from various state and federal agencies, who meet frequently to develop unified priorities for habitat protection and land acquisition. This management group also regularly hosts meetings for representatives from city and county governments, real estate developers, and environmental and conservation organizations to discuss efforts to plan and coordinate land acquisitions.

The six state conservancies are also examples of formal approaches to acquiring and protecting land in various parts of the State. The conservancies acquire land to support their environmental preservation goals. Since these conservancies operate at the regional level, they provide a forum in which state departments and other entities can inquire about acquisition opportunities within these geographical areas.

Joint ventures are another example of formal coordination among California and other states, federal agencies, and nongovernmental organizations. A joint venture generally focuses on a geographical region or area of interest to multiple entities. For example, the Intermountain West Joint Venture covers 11 western states, including California, and the Pacific Coast Joint Venture encompasses the states of Washington, Oregon, and California. Federal, state, and local governments, private organizations, and individuals pool their resources to fund these joint ventures, which allow the various entities to cooperate to accomplish goals that could be difficult for them to attain individually.

Although the NCCP, conservancies, and joint ventures offer many opportunities for coordination, their focus is limited. A statewide land use policy is still needed to provide greater cohesion among state entities that acquire land for ecosystem restoration and wildlife habitat preservation.

involved rather than focusing on long-term growth and development strategies for the entire State. Moreover, an informal structure does not ensure that state entities are held accountable for taking the proper action on agreed-upon decisions.

### **FOR ALMOST 30 YEARS, THE DEVELOPMENT OF STATEWIDE LAND USE POLICY HAS REMAINED DORMANT**

Despite a specific state law enacted nearly 30 years ago, California is still without a statewide land use policy. In 1970, the Legislature recognized the necessity of having one entity at the state level responsible for developing land use policies to protect California's resources and to ensure the preservation and use of its land for the good of its population. The Legislature envisioned the OPR as the most appropriate entity and directed it to prepare a comprehensive statewide environmental goals and policies report. Moreover, it gave immediate and high priority to the development of a comprehensive land use policy. The report was to include, at a minimum, a statewide land use policy, a 20-year to 30-year prospective overview describing state growth and development, and a statement of approved state environmental goals and objectives, including those directed to land use, conservation of natural resources, and air and water quality.

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*Despite a legal requirement to do so, the OPR has never issued a statewide land use policy.*

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In June 1973, the OPR issued the first statewide environmental goals and policies report, stating clearly that it did not represent a comprehensive land use policy. In fact, the report indicates that the State's goal for land use was to develop and maintain a series of policies, including standards and criteria to serve as a guide for state, regional, county, and city planning efforts. In February 1978, the OPR issued a partial update to the 1973 report, which attempted to identify government actions that could revitalize the State's urban areas, including cities and suburbs. Once again, the OPR's report lacked a statewide land use policy. The OPR still has not developed a comprehensive land use policy, and it has not issued a new or updated goals and policies report since 1978, despite state law requiring that such a report be produced every four years.

overseeing the continuous evaluation and execution of state-wide environmental goals, including statewide land use policies, it needs to ensure that the OPR has sufficient resources to do so.

### **IN DEVELOPING A COMPREHENSIVE LAND USE POLICY, THE OPR SHOULD CONSIDER THE EFFORTS OF OTHER STATE ENTITIES**

The OPR's responsibility for developing a statewide land use policy includes identifying environmental goals pertaining to the use of land in the State. In addressing this component, the OPR can use the resources and efforts of other entities. One such effort currently underway is a project that will lead to a statewide conservation and habitat assessment strategy. The fiscal year 1999-2000 Budget Act authorized \$250,000 for the Resources Agency to begin developing this project to assess the current condition of the State's natural resources and habitat and establish long-term funding and policy priorities and targets for future investment in resource protection and habitat acquisition or preservation. The Resources Agency expects the project to include an assessment of available resource data that will identify opportunities, gaps in data, and future needs related to statewide conservation and land stewardship.

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*In its January 2000 status report to the Legislature, the Resources Agency underscored the necessity for statewide planning.*

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In its January 2000 status report to the Legislature, the Resources Agency underscored the necessity for statewide planning by acknowledging that the State does not have a strategic approach to ensure that major investments in wildlife habitat and agricultural land conservation are being made most effectively. It plans to provide an additional report to the Legislature that summarizes its initial results and provides more detail on the extent of the project, its time lines, and its funding needs. The Resources Agency will submit this report along with its revised budget change proposal for the project as part of the State's fiscal year 2000-01 budget process. Although the project is still in the preliminary stage of development, it appears to cover many areas of common interest to the OPR in developing a statewide land use policy.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

To ensure that it fulfills its responsibility for developing a statewide land use policy, the OPR should do the following:

- Develop and implement a comprehensive approach for addressing statewide land use planning. Inherent in this mission should be the development of an overall plan for the State to acquire land for ecosystem restoration and wildlife habitat preservation.
- Identify those resources it can use from projects and studies already performed by other entities, such as the Resources Agency's statewide conservation and habitat assessment project, and consider this data when developing its approach.
- Project staffing and resource requirements it needs to fulfill its mandates, and seek additional staff and resources as necessary.
- Update the statewide environmental goals and policies report and continue to update this report every four years, as state law dictates.
- Work with other state entities to ensure that a composite inventory of land the State owns exists. To facilitate statewide land use planning, the inventory should include information on the purpose for which each property was acquired. ■

## CHAPTER 2

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### ***The Department of Fish and Game and the Department of Parks and Recreation Should Improve Management of Their Land***

#### CHAPTER SUMMARY

**T**he Department of Fish and Game (Fish and Game) and the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) do not adequately manage the land they acquire for ecosystem restoration and wildlife habitat preservation. Neither department has a written plan defining management goals and strategies for at least one-third of the properties it owns. Existing plans often have not been updated to account for changes in the condition of the land, changes in land use, or advances in scientific practice. These departments also lack uniform procedures for staff to document the approaches they use to manage land to ensure that they are meeting their goals and strategies. Consequently, they have no way of knowing whether they are maintaining properties adequately for their intended purposes, such as protecting endangered species or restoring critical ecosystems.

#### NEITHER DEPARTMENT PREPARES A MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR EACH PROPERTY IT ACQUIRES

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***Although Fish and Game and the DPR require staff to prepare management plans for land acquired, they have not completed plans for 318 properties and parks.***

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Both Fish and Game and the DPR require their staff to prepare formal plans describing goals and strategies for managing the land they acquire. Each plan is to include information such as proposed use, maintenance schedules, any environmental impacts, and staffing needs. Although Fish and Game and DPR staff are required to prepare a plan to manage each specific property or park, plans do not exist for a significant number of properties or parks.

The State's policy is to acquire and restore to the highest possible level those areas that can most successfully sustain wildlife. However, Fish and Game has not completed land management plans for more than half of its properties. For instance, it has no plan for Rancho Jamul, 2,260 acres acquired in 1997 to preserve

example, the DPR has no plan for Castle Crags State Park, a unit in the Northern Buttes District encompassing about 4,350 acres that was classified as a state park in 1963. Until the DPR completes and implements its general plans, it cannot ensure that the use of a park meets the initial intent of the acquisition.

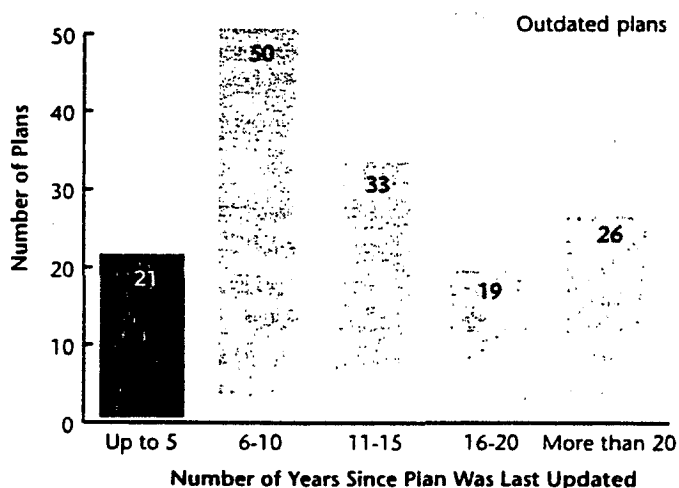
## BOTH DEPARTMENTS USE OUTDATED PLANS TO MANAGE SOME PROPERTIES

Using a current plan that outlines the use of the land and compliance with relevant requirements for overseeing the land is a basic principle of land management. However, neither Fish and Game nor the DPR regularly updates its plans. Both departments have management plans or general plans that by their own standards are outdated.

Although Fish and Game requires a review of its land management plans at least every five years, as Figure 5 shows, 128 (86 percent) of its 149 completed plans are more than 5 years old. Half of its completed plans are at least 10 years old and have never been updated. Consequently, Fish and Game may be using goals and objectives that are no longer relevant due to changing priorities and resource management approaches.

**FIGURE 5**

### A Majority of Fish and Game's Land Management Plans Are Outdated



Source: Department of Fish and Game, Land and Facilities Branch.



informed decisions concerning land use, maintenance schedules, any environmental impacts, and staffing needs, the DPR should update these plans.

### **THE DEPARTMENTS DO NOT ADEQUATELY MANAGE SOME LAND**

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*For three of the four Fish and Game properties and three of the six DPR parks we reviewed, the departments did not meet certain objectives or undertake some restoration projects.*

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Fish and Game has not always been able to adequately manage land it acquired for ecosystem restoration and wildlife habitat preservation. In 1995, it inspected 245 of its properties and found that 74 percent of the land had critical site maintenance problems, such as severe resource damage, public safety and nuisance problems associated with trespassers, and other uncontrolled or unauthorized uses. Fish and Game did not meet some of its objectives for managing three of the four properties we reviewed. Although the deputy director of administration believes that certain objectives have been met for these properties, he agrees that other objectives have not been met. For instance, Fish and Game acknowledges that it has not met some of the objectives contained in its land management plan for the Camp Cady Wildlife Area in San Bernardino County, which is desert riparian habitat for various protected species. In addition, although Fish and Game states that it has met its maintenance goals for 11,000 acres of deer winter range in the Doyle Wildlife Area in Lassen County, it has not met its goal of undertaking projects to enhance the habitat on this property.

The DPR also does not adequately manage some of its parks. It had not undertaken certain restoration projects for three of the six parks we reviewed. For instance, the district superintendent told us that staff at the Leo Carillo State Park in Los Angeles County have not yet begun work on removing German ivy, an invasive, nonnative plant. The district superintendent also told us that staff shortages prevent adequate monitoring of some of the 40,000 acres in the Topanga and Malibu sectors of the district.

Consistent and thorough management of acquired land is essential for ongoing benefits. Delays in restoring or maintaining land may also result in additional problems. For example, by postponing a prescribed burn project—the setting of a controlled fire in a specific area to clear the land of fallen branches and undergrowth—the DPR allows conditions for a catastrophic wildfire to develop and jeopardizes the ecological health of the entire area.

## INSUFFICIENT FUNDING HAMPERS EFFECTIVE LAND MANAGEMENT

State departments acquire land that meets their goals and objectives for restoring ecosystems and preserving wildlife habitat as it becomes available. The departments also acquire land that meets the intent of certain bond acts. Regardless of the circumstances, when a department acquires new property, it also assumes the responsibility of land management.

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*In 1991, Fish and Game estimated that an extra \$8 million annually and an additional 92 positions were needed to fully manage its properties.*

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Over the past decade, Fish and Game has communicated to the Legislature the funding shortfalls affecting its ability to manage the land it acquires. Historically, Fish and Game has allotted between \$6.8 million and \$15.6 million, or about 5 percent to 8 percent of its annual budget, for land management. In 1991, it reported to the Legislature that its pace of acquiring land exceeded its ability to provide resources for land management. Fish and Game estimated that to fully manage its properties, it would need an additional 92 positions and \$8 million annually. On three separate occasions—1978, 1990, and 1992—the Legislature declared that Fish and Game has not been properly funded.

In 1997, Fish and Game submitted a budget change proposal for almost \$2.6 million, stating that it had inadequate staffing and funding to manage and enhance the property it had acquired. Fish and Game also stated that it was unable to provide reliable and timely data on species and habitats to facilitate habitat conservation planning. Although this proposal was approved, most of its 12 authorized positions were not filled due to an unanticipated revenue shortfall in fiscal year 1997-98. However, for fiscal year 2000-01, Fish and Game will receive nearly \$4 million, of which a portion will fund land management activities. Fish and Game is currently in the process of evaluating its existing programs so that it can develop long-term funding options. It expects to consult with both the Legislature and its constituents on the best option for funding its programs.

The deputy director of park operations told us that the DPR also lacks the necessary funding to adequately manage all of the land and natural resources under its stewardship. In addition, two district superintendents commented on how staff shortages affect their ability to manage their land. In its fiscal year 1999-2000 memorandum of understanding with the Legislature, the DPR states that in recent years its budget has been limited to basic park operations, and the backlog of

existing major maintenance projects be adequately funded before additional land with similar needs is acquired, the act would have established a priority for state departments to address the restoration and improvement of their existing land before acquiring more. For instance, the act could have identified a fixed amount or percentage of the total bond issue that must be used for existing unmet major maintenance activities. The act could also have established a designated revenue stream that could be drawn against in future years for ongoing land management activities.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Fish and Game and the DPR should continue to request additional funding to ensure that land acquired for ecosystem restoration and wildlife habitat preservation is kept in its desired condition.

To ensure that they adequately manage their land, Fish and Game and the DPR should do the following:

- Prepare final plans for all of their properties and parks that describe goals and strategies for managing the land.
- Update their older land management or general plans.
- Perform restoration, rehabilitation, and improvement projects, as well as periodic inspections of all land, in accordance with their land management or general plans.

Moreover, Fish and Game should develop and implement procedures for documenting its land management activities that address the goals and objectives of its land management plans. In addition, the DPR should complete and implement its pilot guideline for standard, uniform monitoring procedures.

As the public has recently expressed its interest in preserving land for environmental purposes, the Legislature should consider doing the following:

- Establish a mechanism in future bond acts involving land acquisitions that sets aside a portion of the proceeds for major maintenance projects.

# APPENDIX

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## ***Land Acquired by the Department of Fish and Game, the Department of Parks and Recreation, and State Conservancies for Ecosystem Restoration and Wildlife Habitat Preservation***

**T**his appendix summarizes the land acquired by state entities for the purposes of restoring ecosystems and preserving wildlife habitat. We attempted to identify all of the land the Department of Fish and Game (Fish and Game), the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR), and the state conservancies held for these purposes as of December 31, 1999. We also tried to identify the total amount of land that these entities acquired between 1994 and 1999. Table 1 presents the total amount of land held by the departments and conservancies, and Table 2 shows annual acquisition activity. Although the State has numerous methods for acquiring land, the two most common are by purchasing the fee title, which results in full title to the land, and acquiring an easement, which results in restrictions on the use of the land.

We asked each department and conservancy to provide the data using their inventory records. We also asked them to identify the portion of their land that was being managed by another entity, but neither department could provide this data. We compared Fish and Game and DPR inventory records to the statewide real property inventory system (statewide inventory) maintained by the Department of General Services. However, we did not validate the information provided by the departments and conservancies.

We extracted from the statewide inventory those Fish and Game properties that were acquired using funds designated for restoration and preservation purposes. However, these properties do not reflect all of the land that Fish and Game has acquired for these purposes, because the statewide inventory does not list a funding source for many of the properties it contains. For

TABLE 1

**Total Land Held by Fish and Game, the DPR, and Conservancies  
as of December 31, 1999**

		<b>Land Held and Managed by Conservancy/Department (in acres)</b>	<b>Land Held by Conservancy/Department but Managed by Others (in acres)</b>
California Tahoe Conservancy	Fee Title	5,666	28
	Easements	120	0
	<b>Subtotal:</b>	<b>5,786</b>	<b>28</b>
Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy	Fee Title	1,622	160
	Easements	1,138	0
	<b>Subtotal:</b>	<b>2,760</b>	<b>160</b>
San Joaquin River Conservancy	Fee Title	123	189
	Easements	0	0
	<b>Subtotal:</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>189</b>
Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy	Fee Title	0	11,106
	Easements	0	0
	<b>Subtotal:</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>11,106</b>
State Coastal Conservancy	Fee Title	611	837
	Easements	3,609	0
	Other	7	0
	<b>Subtotal:</b>	<b>4,227</b>	<b>837</b>
Department of Parks and Recreation†	Fee Title	1,197,117*	
	Easements	43,238	
	Other‡	165,791	
	<b>Subtotal:</b>	<b>1,406,146</b>	
Department of Fish and Game	Fee Title	441,211*	
	Easements	66,853	
	Other‡	352,656	
	<b>Subtotal:</b>	<b>860,720</b>	
<b>Total:</b>		<b>2,279,762</b>	<b>12,320</b>

Source: Survey responses from state conservancies.  
Department of Fish and Game inventory records.  
Department of Parks and Recreation inventory records.

Note: Amounts are rounded to the nearest acre. Amounts less than one acre are omitted from this table.

\* The department states that the total for fee title includes land it holds that is managed by others; however, it could not provide this breakdown.

† As discussed in the report, the DPR does not separately identify land held for ecosystem restoration and wildlife habitat preservation. Therefore, the amounts reported on this table represent all of its properties.

‡ These amounts include other types of interests in land such as leases, licenses, and management agreements.

*Agency's comments provided as text only.*

Governor's Office of Planning and Research  
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June 15, 2000

Mary P. Noble  
Acting State Auditor  
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RE: REPORT ON WILDLIFE HABITAT AND ECOSYSTEM

DEAR MS. NOBLE:

The Office of Planning and Research (OPR) has reviewed the Bureau of State Audit's draft report entitled *California's Wildlife Habitat and Ecosystem: The State Needs to Improve Its Land Acquisition Planning and Oversight*. We concur with the report's recommendations concerning OPR. However, we note that OPR has consistently engaged in statewide planning activities through its technical assistance role to state agencies and local governments. Examples of this technical assistance include, but are not limited to: 1) helping local agencies in the development and implementation of General Plans, 2) publication of technical advisory documents on a variety of land use related subjects such as specific plans, zoning ordinances and environmental mitigation and 3) maintenance of a database of environmental assessment documents which represent the major land use proposals in the State.

Additionally, with respect to the Auditor's recommendations, we note the importance of other state departments and agencies having an adequate information infrastructure from which OPR can obtain the necessary data to effectively coordinate land use planning and develop an Environmental Goals and Policy Report.

Please feel free to contact me with any additional questions you might have.

Sincerely,

*(Signed by: Steven A. Nissen)*

STEVEN A. NISSEN

*Agency's comments provided as text only.*

California Resources Agency  
Mary D. Nichols  
Secretary  
1416 Ninth Street, Suite 1311  
Sacramento, California 95814

June 15, 2000

Mary P. Noble\*  
Acting State Auditor  
Bureau of State Audits  
555 Capitol Mall, Suite 300  
Sacramento, California 95814

Dear Ms. Noble:

Subject: California's Wildlife Habitat and Ecosystem Audit Number 2000-101

In response to the report entitled "California's Wildlife Habitat and Ecosystem: The State Needs to Improve Its Land Acquisition Planning and Oversight," we were pleased to see recognized the efforts of this Administration to bring together the prominent land acquisition organizations from the state and federal governments, along with the nonprofit sector for improved land acquisition coordination. Nevertheless, on page 15 the report suggests that "...a comprehensive statewide land use policy would improve these efforts." I wholeheartedly concur. Indeed, in recognition of such a need, the Resources Agency received funding in the 1999-2000 fiscal year to begin the development of a statewide conservation and habitat blueprint. That effort, known as the California Continuing Resource Investment Strategy Project (CCRISP) will be expanded in 2000 budget. One of the goals of CCRISP is to provide statewide scientific data and analysis that will facilitate the identification of the most sensitive lands in need of protection and will help facilitate the development of a comprehensive statewide land use policy.

The report correctly states that the Departments of Fish and Game and Parks and Recreation do not have management plans for all of their properties. Resource constraints over many years have prevented the preparation of new plans, and the updating of old plans. Nevertheless each department takes resource management responsibilities very seriously.

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\*California State Auditor's comments appear on page 43.

Mary P. Noble  
June 15, 2000  
Page 3

in the Public Resources Code, Section 5019.50-74, provide policy guidance on the overall purpose of a unit and general management objectives. In addition, specific purpose statements have been prepared for all units of the State Park System. Together, these classification statutes, statements of purpose and additional systemwide management directives guide management actions. In recognition of the need for a cohesive statewide strategy for managing the State Park System, the department is currently reviewing and revising its goals and operating procedures through a process entitled "A Path to Our Future."

This is not meant to imply that more effort toward the preparation of unit general plans and management plans is not needed to better manage wildlife areas and parklands. The Resources Agency will work with the Departments of Fish and Game and Parks and Recreation to develop a workable plan and timetable for the development of new plans or review and updating, as necessary, of existing plans for all properties.

*(Signed by: Mary D. Nichols)*

Mary D. Nichols  
Secretary for Resources



# COMMENTS

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## ***California State Auditor's Comments on the Response From the California Resources Agency***

**T**o provide clarity and perspective, we are commenting on the California Resources Agency's (Resources Agency) response to our audit report. The following numbers correspond to the numbers we have placed in the response.

- ① Our concern is that the State does not have a comprehensive inventory system that it could use to facilitate statewide land use planning by readily identifying land acquired for specific purposes, including ecosystem restoration and wildlife habitat preservation. Although we agree that the Department of Fish and Game does identify the purpose for which it acquires land, this information is not used in the statewide real property inventory maintained by the Department of General Services. Furthermore, as noted in the appendix, the Department of Parks and Recreation does not separately identify landholdings by purpose.
- ② It is unclear how the Resources Agency can assert that management efforts being carried out are current without ensuring that the goals and objectives for the use of the land are current and relevant. As stated on page 26, there are various factors that dictate the need for regular review and updating of plans, such as changes in the condition of the land, changes in land use, or advances in scientific practice. Using a current plan that outlines the use of the land and compliance with relevant requirements for overseeing the land is a basic principle of land management.